DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 160 229 PS 010 148

AUTHOR Katz, Lilian G.
TITLE Principles of Staff Development in Programs for Young Children.
PUB DATE Sep 78
NOTE 6p.
JOURNAL CIT Children in Contemporary Society (in press)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Improvement; Effective Teaching; *Guidelines; Individual Characteristics; *Inservice Teacher Education; Program Development; *Staff Improvement; *Teacher Educators; Teacher Morale; Teacher Motivation; *Teaching Skills; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines 6 principles for inservice educators and others engaged in staff development for early childhood programs. Principle 1 recommends that inservice educators focus on modifying a teacher's understandings (the constructions, concepts, or schemata relevant to his or her work) rather than on giving prescriptions for behavior. Principle 2 recommends strengthening enduring dispositions (e.g., inventiveness, patience, and enthusiasm) thought to be related to effective teaching. Principle 3 supports a focus on helping teachers to use competencies they already possess more reliably, consistently, appropriately, and confidently. Principle 4 suggests the importance of building long-term relationships with teachers instead of offering hasty corrections. Principle 5 proposes that inservice educators maintain an optimum psychological distance from the teachers they work with. Principle 6 recommends the provision of moderate amounts of inspiration as well as encouragement and support to keep up the teacher's enthusiasm. (Author/CM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED160229

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Principles of Staff Development in Programs for Young Children*

Lilian G. Katz, Ph.D.

Professor of Early Childhood Education
Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education
September, 1978

All teachers, at every level, have to face the fact that they cannot offer learners all of the possible activities that might be instructive to them. When we work with people in any situation, we are constantly making choices and decisions about many aspects of our relationships and our work. In a given teaching situation there are probably a dozen -- or maybe 50 -- right or good ways to respond; and probably as many or more wrong or bad ways too! Teachers cannot respond in all the ways that are possible. Choices have to be made, and obviously many different factors affect those choices. Some of the activities or responses to teachers made by inservice workers are chosen on the basis of tradition, e.g. "we have art workshops every Spring"; some on the basis of efficiency, e.g. a single speaker presenting information to a large group. Others are chosen because inservice educators think teachers either want them or will attend them; some are selected or rejected on the basis of the resources available, or because of particular philosophical commitments, and so forth. The six principles outlined below are recommended as foci for inservice educators and others engaged in staff development. They are offered in the hope that they may be useful in the process of making choices and decisions about how to respond to teachers, what to do next, and what activities to select from among the wide variety of potential activities by which we hope to help teachers and others who work with children with their own teaching and caregiving. The principles and techniques are also intended to highlight particular aspects of the behavior and development of caregivers and teachers which seem to have been under-emphasized since the competency or performance-based training movement has gained so much momentum.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lilian G. Katz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

PS 010148

* Children in Contemporary Society, In press.

Principle No. 1: Focus on the teacher's* understanding of the situation at hand. The term understanding is used here to refer to the teacher's constructions, concepts or schemata relevant to her work. They will include a wide range of axioms, presuppositions, assumptions, etc. about such things as how children learn, what "works," the teacher's effects on her pupils, what she** expects of herself, what others expect, her role, duties, and so forth.

It is suggested that of all the potential courses of action available to inservice educators, those which modify relevant understandings are most useful in the long run. The focus of such activities would be to help teachers develop understandings that are more appropriate, more accurate, deeper and more fully and finely differentiated than they had previously been (see Katz, 1977). The rationale underlying this principle is that the focus on understanding helps the teacher to strengthen attributes she can keep and use after the inservice educator has left the scene. It seems reasonable to assume that modified understandings are more likely to help the teacher generate new behaviors, hopefully, more effective ones, than are prescriptions, directives and instructions. An underlying presupposition here is that an inservice educator is someone who has more useful, appropriate, accurate or differentiated understandings than the teacher being helped. Such differences in understandings determine the content of the relationship between the inservice educator and teacher, and also legitimize her authority to provide inservice education.

Principle No. 2: Focus on strengthening enduring dispositions. Widespread enthusiasm for performance-based teacher education, and competency-based education, in general, seems to be associated with the risk of underemphasizing the development of learners' dispositions. It is suggested here that in making choices as to which types of responses to make, or which types of activities to provide, it is best to focus on those activities which are likely to strengthen enduring dispositions thought to be related to effective teaching. Similarly, responses to teachers should focus on weakening those dispositions which might undermine effective teaching. By dispositions I mean relatively stable "habits of mind," proclivities, predilections or tendencies to respond to one's experiences or to given situations in certain

* The term teacher is used throughout to simplify phrasing even though these principles are intended to be helpful to others working with children.

** The feminine gender is used to simplify sentence construction; the welcome presence of male teachers in early childhood education is acknowledged hereby.

ways. Some examples of dispositions likely to be related to effective teaching include inventiveness or resourcefulness, patience (i.e. long reaction time), friendliness, enthusiasm, etc. Some dispositions likely to undermine effective teaching include impetuosity, unfriendliness, hypercriticality, and so forth.

Two suppositions provide the rationale for this principle. First, it seems obvious that we cannot teach all the knowledge, skills, methods, techniques, etc. which are of potential use to teachers. Both lengths of time, and point in time, mitigate such an accomplishment. That being the case, it seems advisable to teach teachers in such a way as to strengthen their dispositions to go on learning, to be resourceful, and to be inventive long after our work with them is over. Secondly, while we do indeed want to help teachers with specific skills and methods, it is important to do so without undermining these "self helpful" dispositions. Helping teachers with specific competencies remains an important part of the content of inservice work. The suggested focus here is on guarding against the risk of teaching such competencies at the expense of the self-helpful dispositions. Similarly, we should guard against helping teachers with competencies in such a way that might strengthen or engender a disposition to be dependent, uninventive and unresourceful.

Principle No. 3: Focus on competencies already acquired. In our eagerness to effect change and to be "change agents" we often overlook the possibility that the teachers we work with may already have the competencies appropriate for or required of a given situation. In such cases the focus should be on helping the teachers to use already available competencies more reliably and consistently, more appropriately, or more confidently. For example a teacher may be sufficiently competent at guiding a discussion with her kindergarteners, but may fluctuate excessively. In such cases, teachers probably do not require modules on discussion skills, but perhaps fuller understandings of the causes of their own variability, or some help which alerts them to cues which causes them to perform in ways that--as the saying goes--they "know better" than to do! For example, in the latter example the teacher may be helped by refraining from leading discussions except when classroom conditions are optimum for her. In that way she may be able to strengthen her mastery more surely before she tries it out under less than optimum conditions.

Similarly, teachers of young children are often exhorted to "listen" to them. It is reasonable to assume that all teachers have such "listening" competence, although they may apply listening skills inappropriately and/or inconsistently. In yet another type of case a teacher may have the skills required of a situation, but fails to use them with sufficient confidence to be effective. For example, in cases of setting limits, redirecting or stopping disruptive behavior, if the teacher's actions betray a lack of confidence, children may preceive mixed signals, challenge her and thus exacerbate the situation. In such cases the inservice educator's role should focus on "shaping" and/or supporting the teacher's efforts to practice and strengthen already available behaviors, rather than on the acquisition of new competencies.

Principle No. 4: Focus on Building Long Term Relationships. This principle refers to those situations in which an observation of a teacher prompts us to offer "corrections". Sometimes, in our eagerness to be helpful and useful, and to establish our credibility, we are too hasty to offer those corrections. Though momentarily, in such situations we may be "right", we may give the corrections and lose the opportunity to go on helping that teacher over a longer period of time. In other words, such cases require us to make a choice between being direct or "up front" at a given moment, (thereby jeopardizing the development of a deeper relationship) and withholding the correction for the sake of future learning. We are suggesting that the choice should focus upon those responses - including abstaining from responding - which will strengthen the development of a relationship of mutual confidence and respect that the teacher can draw upon in the future. That future may then provide the teacher with a stable, welcome and reliable source of corrections over a long period of development.

Principle No. 5: Focus on Maintaining an Optimum Distance Between Yourself and the Teacher. On the surface this principle appears to be counter-intuitive. Many educators consider closeness, warmth and supportiveness essential and valuable attributes of their relationships with learners. Research seems to support the contention that warmth, for example is significantly related to teacher effectiveness. It is suggested that inservice educators may be tempted to make the error of being too close to their teachers. It is recommended instead that we strive for an optimum (not maximum) distance between ourselves and the teachers we work with. Obviously some people can cope with a larger number of close relationships than others, and the optimum

closeness also varies from one educator to another.

The rationale underlying this principle is four-fold. First, excessive closeness may inhibit or limit our ability to evaluate the learner's progress realistically. If we become too attached to the teacher we are working with we may be unable to help her to confront serious weaknesses; indeed, we may fail to perceive the weakness at all. Secondly, if we become too close to the teacher we may unintentionally impinge on her right to privacy, a right which deserves protection. Thirdly, there is some danger that as we become too close to one of the teachers in a group we are responsible for, we may inadvertently make disparaging remarks about another member of the group and thereby undermine our own trustworthiness, credibility and effectiveness. Fourthly, if we allow ourselves to become too close or involved with our teachers we may find ourselves "burned out" in a few months, and suffer not only personal stress, but also lose our effectiveness on the job.

Principle No. 6: Focus on providing moderate amounts of inspiration. Many of the teachers we are trying to help can cope admirably with the complex tasks and responsibilities they face. They may not require new techniques, packages, or gimmicks (although they may believe them necessary), but simply occasional renewal of courage to sustain their efforts and to maintain enough enthusiasm to keep going at an unglamourous and perhaps underappreciated job. Excessive sapping of courage or enthusiasm at times approaching depression (i.e., believing one's efforts have no effect) is a potential cause of ineffectiveness no matter how many competencies the individual has. Such ineffectiveness may depress enthusiasm and courage even further, which, in turn, may decrease effectiveness again. An inservice educator may be able to intervene in the downward spiral by providing a modicum of inspiration as well as encouragement and support. It seems important that the inspiration be specific to the work setting rather than just a generalized message. In addition, it is suggested that supportive and encouraging messages contain real and useful information about the significance of the teachers' efforts. Furthermore, it may be wise to provide such inspiration in moderate rather than maximum amounts so that teachers do not become "hooked" or dependent on it; the latter might undermine the strength of their dispositions to be self-helpful in the long run. As no inservice program can anticipate all of a teacher's future needs, the overall intent of these principles is to provide those responses and activities which focus on the long term growth and development of those who work with young children.